

7th JUDICIAL DISTRICT
FAMILY COURT SERVICES 2006-2007

Family Court Services in the 7th Judicial District has implemented a Domestic Violence Court Project. This is a grant funded project. Through the grant we were able to hire a Domestic Violence Court Case manager. One judge hears all domestic violence cases, criminal no contact cases in the morning and civil protection order cases in the afternoon. The judge is also assigned all subsequent divorce actions until or unless he has more high conflict cases that he can reasonably manage and then at that time the cases are assigned to other judges. The DV Case Manager follows all DV filings. She meets with the victims to inquire about services they are receiving and to refer them to appropriate services where there is need. The DV Court Case Manager follows the batterers to check on compliance. The grant requires that we maintain stats and those stats are collected and reported. The DV Court Case Manager works with the domestic violence center (s) who provide an orientation class for all persons requesting a civil protection order. The domestic violence center (s) also provide victims with a 5-week safety planning classes. The Domestic Violence Court Judge refers victims to the 5-week safety planning class. It has become common practice that the Judge will not dismiss a CPO until the victim has completed the safety planning class. We are currently establishing a protocol for all court ordered domestic violence evaluations to be done by a neutral evaluator. This is in compliance with Idaho Statute but in many small communities the practice has not been followed and evaluators have also provided treatment. Beginning May 21, 2007 all court ordered domestic violence evaluations are given to the Domestic Violence Court Manager who randomly assigns them to neutral evaluators. The above mentioned grant provides funds to cover a portion of the neutral evaluation if the party qualifies for assistance according to the sliding fee scale. This program started in Bonneville County but is currently operating in Jefferson, Bingham and Madison Counties.

FCS continues to expand the Supervised Access Program. We have trained supervisors throughout the 7th dist. and currently offer Supervised Access in 6 of our 10 counties.

Family Court Services provide the court with Case Management Screenings when court ordered. The case screenings are a modified form of the ADR screenings. The modifications came from our Case Coordination project that was completed in 2005. Judges from all counties have utilized the screening process and we have requested feedback from judges and attorneys.

In addition to Custody mediation the 7th District uses Small Claims Mediation in 3 counties and the Juvenile Justice Program uses Victim-Offender and Parent-Teen Mediation throughout our 10 Counties. We recently hired a coordinator for the V/O P/T mediation program. Her name is Jan Baxter, a retired juvenile probation officer. The program serves court ordered cases, probation referrals, referrals from prosecutors, juvenile correction facilities, community and school referrals.

Child Protection Family Drug Court continues to be an active and successful problem solving court. We currently have 13 participants. Health and Welfare Child Protection Services provides case management along with probation to hold participants accountable with drug treatment and child protection case plans.

Domestic Violence Court Case Manager

In March 2006, the 7th Judicial District established a Domestic Violence Court presided over by the Honorable Mark Riddoch and hired Lori Anne Nichols as Domestic Violence Court Case Manager.

The focus of Domestic Violence Court is to comply with the theory of One Family One Judge. All too often families enter the court system for one purpose and as their cases evolve to other needs and issues the judge does not have all of the information pertaining to a family and subsequently is not able to make the most informed decision. Domestic Violence Court is designed for the Judge to hear all criminal No Contact Order cases and all Civil Protection Order extension hearings. If a divorce has been filed prior to the filing for a protection order, the assigned divorce judge will keep the divorce case and through assistance of the DV Court Case manager be provided all pertinent family information regarding Domestic Violence filings. If a divorce is filed after a protection order is granted, the DV Court Judge will be assigned the divorce case as well as the DV case.

This process is facilitated by the Domestic Violence Court Case Manager. This position is currently funded by Idaho Supreme Court/ Council on Domestic Violence grant. The DV Court Case Manager in effect keeps the wheels in motion to provide the Judge with complete information pertaining to the family, assists the Victim by referral to services inside the Court system as well as services within the various communities in the 10 county judicial district, and maintains contact with various departments and agencies to see that the batterer is held accountable.

The DV Court Case Manager works as a liaison with domestic violence advocacy groups throughout the judicial district to provide education to petitioners seeking a civil protection order prior to filing for the order. The DV Court Case Manager monitors the efforts of the advocacy groups to ensure that petitioners are provided with correct information. The DV Court Case Manager provides the Judge with up to date information on all DV cases by screening DV cases and providing that information via a case cover sheet. When children are involved the DV Court Case Manager mediates a temporary parenting plan. She attends all civil and criminal domestic violence hearings.

In an effort to comply with I.C.R. 33.3 the DV Court Case Manager works closely with DV evaluators, treatment providers, and advocacy groups. These efforts represent the Court's need for thorough, neutral DV evaluations, and victims needs for support and assistance.

The DV Court Case Manager is the Court's representative and contact person for quarterly DV Task Force meetings, bi-monthly prosecutor's briefings, weekly staffing with pre-trial services, prosecutors office, probation and treatment providers.

The 7th Judicial District DV Court Case Manager participates in evaluating the Domestic Violence Court Case Manager pilot project by collecting and reporting stats to the Supreme Court. The 7th District DV Court Case Manager collects stats not only for the 7th District but the 6th District and overall State stats as well. She has provided data and ISTARS training to the project's evaluators. This information along with the procedures and processes have been collected and reported in a manual that can be used statewide as other Domestic Violence Courts are established.

The Domestic Violence Court Case Manager Project has been and continues to be a great success in the 7th Judicial District. This process and the manager's services are available to Bingham, Bonneville, Jefferson, Madison and Fremont counties. As in any system change, there are growing pains. As Domestic Violence cases are reviewed, directed and analyzed as to best practice many good procedures have been recognized and a few oversights have been discovered. A long-time probation officer credits the DV Court Case Manager for finally bringing to light problems of the past that have slowed down the process of assisting victims and holding batterers accountable. A court clerk expressed appreciation for having someone available to monitor and communicate with outside agencies that do not understand the court process and have in the past overstepped their boundaries. In the process of requiring neutrality in evaluations, one treatment provider stated that the whole DV process is much more neutral for the victims as well as the batterers with a case manager in place. Judge Mark Riddoch, the presiding Domestic Violence Court Judge said, "I appreciate and rely on Lori Nichols' assistance in her capacity as our Domestic Violence Court Case Manager. She troubleshoots and works with the parents as they prepare parenting plans. Her cover sheet for Civil Protection Order cases provide a very helpful, concise summary of key allegations in the Petition. Her outstanding efforts have facilitated my work and greatly improved efficient and fair processing of these cases."